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The Oslo blood libel is over



When you read the Trump plan closely, you realize it is a mirror image of the Oslo Accords. Rather than Israel being required to prove its good will, the Palestinians are required to prove their commitment to peace.

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From 1994 through 1996, as a captain in the Israel Defense Forces, I served as a member of Israel's negotiating team with the PLO. Those years were the heyday of the so-called peace process. As the coordinator of negotiations on civil affairs for the Coordinator of Government Activities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, I participated in all of the negotiating sessions with the Palestinians that led to a half a dozen or so agreements, including the Interim or Oslo B agreement of Sept. 28, 1995, which transferred civil and military authorities in Judea and Samaria to the PLO.

Throughout the period of my work, I never found any reason to believe the peace process I was a part of would lead to peace. The same Palestinian leaders who joked with us in fancy meeting rooms in Cairo and Taba breached every commitment they made to Israel the minute the sessions ended.

Beginning with the PLO's failure to amend its covenant that called for Israel's destruction in nearly every paragraph; through their refusal to abide by the limits they had accepted on the number of weapons and security forces they were permitted to field in the areas under their security control; their continuous breaches of zoning and building laws and regulations; to their constant Nazi-like anti-Semitic propaganda and incitement and solicitation of terrorism against Israel—it was self-evident they were negotiating in bad faith. They didn't want peace with Israel. They were using the peace process to literally take Israel apart piece by piece.

Israel's leaders shrugged it off. Instead of protesting and cutting off contact until Yasser Arafat and his henchmen ended their perfidious behavior, Israel's leaders ignored what was happening before their faces. And in a way, they had no other option.

When Israel embarked on the Oslo peace process it accepted Oslo's foundational assumption that Israel is to blame for the Palestinian war against it. From the first Oslo agreement, signed on the White House lawn on Sept. 13, 1993, through all its derivative deals, Israel was required to carry out "confidence-building measures," to prove its good faith and peaceful intentions to Arafat and his deputies.

Time after time, Israel was required to release terrorists from prison as a precondition for negotiations with the PLO. The goal of those negotiations in turn was to force Israel to release more terrorists from prison, and give more land, more money, more international legitimacy and still more terrorists to the PLO.

Last Tuesday, this state of affairs ended.

Last Sunday morning, just before he flew to Washington, U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman briefed me on the details of President Donald Trump's peace plan at his home in Herzliya.

Friedman told me that Trump was going to announce that the United States will support an Israeli decision to apply its laws to the Jordan Valley and the Israeli settlements in Judea and Samaria.

I asked what the boundaries of the settlements would be.

He said that they have a map but it isn't precise, so it can be flexibly interpreted. It was developed in consultation with Israeli government experts, he added.

Suspicious, I went granular. Khan al-Ahmar is an illegal, strategically located Bedouin encampment built on the access road to Kfar Adumim, a community north of Jerusalem. Israel's Supreme Court ordered its removal, but bowing to pressure from Germany and allegedly, the International Criminal Court, the government has failed to execute the court order.

I asked if Khan al-Ahmar is part of Kfar Adumim on the American map. Friedman answered in the affirmative.

What about the area called E1, which connects the city of Ma'aleh Adumim to Jerusalem?

Yes, it's inside the map, he said.

How about the illegal building right outside the northern entrance to my community, Efrat, south of Jerusalem in Gush Etzion. The massive illegal building there threatens to turn Efrat's highway access road into a gauntlet. Is that area going to be under Israeli jurisdiction?

He nodded.

How about the isolated communities—Yitzhar, Itamar, Har Bracha? Are they Israel?

Yes, yes, yes, he said. Our map foresees Israel extending sovereignty to about half of Area C, he explained.

What about the other half? Without control of the surrounding areas, the communities in Judea and Samaria will be under constant threat. Their development will be stifled by limitations on the development of critical infrastructure.

For now, Friedman replied, everything in the rest of Area C will be governed as it has been up until now. Israel will have overriding civilian powers and sole security authority. In fact, in our plan, he explained, Israel will have permanent overriding security authority over all of Judea and Samaria, even after a peace agreement is concluded.

Friedman then turned to the nature of the agreement the Trump administration seeks to conclude.

The Palestinians have four years, he explained, to agree to the president's plan. To reach a deal they have to agree to recognize Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people. They have to accept Israeli control over the airspace and the electromagnetic spectrum. They have to agree to a demilitarized state and accept that there will be no Palestinian immigration to Israel from abroad. They have to agree to Israeli sovereignty over the border with Jordan. They have to disarm Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza and demilitarize Gaza.

If they do that, we will recognize them as a state and they will receive the rest of Area C.

What if they don't agree to those terms? I asked.

If they don't agree, he replied, then at the end of four years, Israel will no longer be bound by the terms of the deal and will be free to apply its law to all areas it requires.

You're telling me that in four years we'll be able to apply Israeli law in the rest of the territory? I asked, almost afraid to hear the answer.

Yes, that's right.

My heart started thumping like a rabbit tail.

You mean the Palestinians lose if they don't agree to peace? Does President Trump support this? I asked in stunned disbelief.

Yes, of course, he supports this. It's his plan, after all, Friedman said, smiling and a bit surprised at my reaction.

Boom.

Unannounced, tears began flowing out of my eyes.

Are those tears of happiness or sadness, Friedman asked, concerned.

For several moments, I couldn't speak. Finally, I said, I feel like I need to take off my shoes. I'm witnessing a miracle.

Shortly thereafter, after thanking him and wishing him well (and washing my face), I left his home, got in my car and drove to the Kotel.

As I listened to his briefing, there in his study, I didn't feel like I was alone. There with me were 50 generations of Jews in every corner of the globe mouthing the Psalmist's verses, "And the nations of the world will say, God has greatly blessed them; God has greatly blessed us, we were like dreamers."

And closely, more immediately, as I sat there listening, I felt 27 years of worry and frustration washing away. The 27-year Oslo nightmare was over. The blood libel that blamed Israel for the Palestinians' war against it was rejected by the greatest nation in the world, finally.

When you read the Trump plan closely, you realize it is a mirror image of Oslo. Rather than Israel being required to prove its good will, the Palestinians are required to prove their

commitment to peace.

Consider the issue of releasing Palestinian terrorists.

Like the Oslo deal and its derivatives, the Trump deal includes a section on releasing terrorists. But whereas under Oslo rules, Israel was supposed to release terrorists as a confidence building measure to facilitate the opening of negotiations, under the Trump deal the order is reversed.

Israel is expected to release terrorists only after the Palestinians have returned all of the Israeli prisoners and MIAs and only after a peace deal has been signed.

Whereas Israel was required under Oslo to release murderers, the Trump deal states explicitly that Israel will not release murderers or accessories to murder.

One of the PLO's more appalling demands was that Israel release Arab Israeli citizens convicted on terrorism charges. The subversive demand implied PLO jurisdiction over Arab Israelis. Israel strenuously objected, but all previous U.S. administrations supported the PLO demand.

The Trump deal states explicitly that Israeli citizens will not be released in any future release of terrorists.

There are many problematic aspects to the Trump plan. For instance, it calls for Israel to transfer sovereign territory along the Gaza border to Palestinian control in the framework of the peace deal.

More immediately, the deal requires Israel to suspend building activities in the parts of Area C earmarked for the Palestinians in a future deal, for the next four years. This requirement will pose a major burden to the Israeli communities adjacent to these areas. To develop, these communities require surrounding infrastructure—roads, sewage and other systems—to develop with them.

On the other hand, the Trump plan places no restriction on construction inside of the Israeli communities. Residents of Shiloh and Ariel will have the same property rights as residents of Tel Aviv and Beit She'an.

This then brings us to Israel and the leaders who accepted the Oslo rules for the past 27 years. The Trump plan is a test for Israel. Have we become addicted to the blood libel?

Will Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu keep his word and present a decision to apply Israeli law in the Jordan Valley and the Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria at the next government meeting, or will he lose his nerve and hide behind "technical" issues?

Will Benny Gantz and his Blue and White Party agree to abandon the Oslo blood libel most of its members embrace, and accept that Israel is capable of asserting its sovereign rights to these areas? Or will they hide behind the legal fraternity baying for Netanyahu's head and preserve the anti-Semitic Oslo paradigm for their friends in the Democratic Party?

And will the legal fraternity, led by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, act in accordance with the law, which empowers the government to determine national policies even before elections? Or will it continue to make up laws to block government action and so render the

March 2 poll a referendum between democracy and Zionism and the legal fraternity and post-Zionism?

Under Oslo, Israel had no interest in taking the initiative. Every “step forward” was a set-up. Last week, Trump ended the 27-year nightmare. Oslo is the past. Sovereignty is now. We were like dreamers.

The time has now come to give thanks for the miracle and get on with building our land.

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